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SUBJECT: CN TACTICAL RESPONSE TEAM SEIZES A CESSNA 210 AND
OFFENSIVE WEAPONS IN FIREFIGHT WITH NARCOS NEAR LIVINGSTON

11. SUMMARY: On March 20, 2009 a host nation Tactical Response Team (TRT) consisting of Guatemalan Counter Narcotics Police (SAIA), Guatemalan military special forces unit GEIR/KAIBIL and DEA agents from the GCO intercepted a drug trafficking group as they attempted to off load a shipment of narcotics from an aircraft near Livingston, Izabal. While the JTF-B pilots were attempting to land the TRT, the two JTF-B aircraft came under heavy small arms fire from an estimated 20 to 30 armed individuals who were prepositioned along the airstrip. The pilots of the JTF-B aircraft took evasive action and were able to land the host nation TRT approximately 1,000 meters from the airstrip. The TRT engaged the traffickers in a brief fire fight. The traffickers subsequently abandoned the aircraft after it was unloaded. Numerous vehicles, weapons, communication equipment were abandoned and traffickers fled the scene on foot and with a pickup loaded with the shipment of narcotics. No one was injured. End summary.

The Operation

12. On March 20, 2009 at approximately 1945 hours, a suspect drug trafficking air track was detected as it entered Guatemalan air space. The air track was followed to a clandestine air strip approximately 16 miles north east of Livingston, Izabal. After the aircraft landed, the crew of the aircraft and 20 to 30 armed individuals proceeded to offload what is believed to be a large drug shipment. At that time, the host nation TRT accompanied by DEA agents who were on standby at the military base in Poptun, Peten boarded two JTF-B air assets and proceeded to the area where the suspect aircraft landed. As the two JTF-B aircraft were approaching the airstrip, they came under heavy gunfire from the 20 to 30 armed men who were pre-positioned on the runway.

13. The pilots of the JTF-B aircraft took evasive action and were able to land the TRT, which immediately engaged the 20 to 30 armed men in a fire fight. During the fire fight, other members of the drug trafficking group loaded the shipment of narcotics aboard a vehicle and under the cover of darkness fled the area.

14. The traffickers left behind the aircraft described as a Cessna 210 Venezuelan registration YV-1721, three pickup trucks, two SUVs, a motorcycle, an all terrain vehicle (ATV), three ak-47 assault rifles, two handguns, 30 millimeter Russian made heavy machine, several fragmentation grenades and two portable radios. Also recovered at the scene was the passport of the person who is believed to have piloted the aircraft. He is described as a Colombian national Jairo Junior Garcia Rincones, DOB 10-25-1966. His passport had a valid US visa and reflected a recent entry into the US in March 2009

15. Sources who participated in the action reported that the vehicle that was loaded at the airstrip was joined by a second vehicle near the runway and the drugs were transferred to the second vehicle and the group departed the area.

Comments

¶6. This operation demonstrated seamless coordination between DEA, TRT, JTF-B, PNC and the Guatemalan Military. It also drew attention to the fact that drug traffickers are now using explosives and heavy machine guns not previously seen in the Guatemalan drug war. Future operations will benefit from the lessons learned.

MCFARLAND